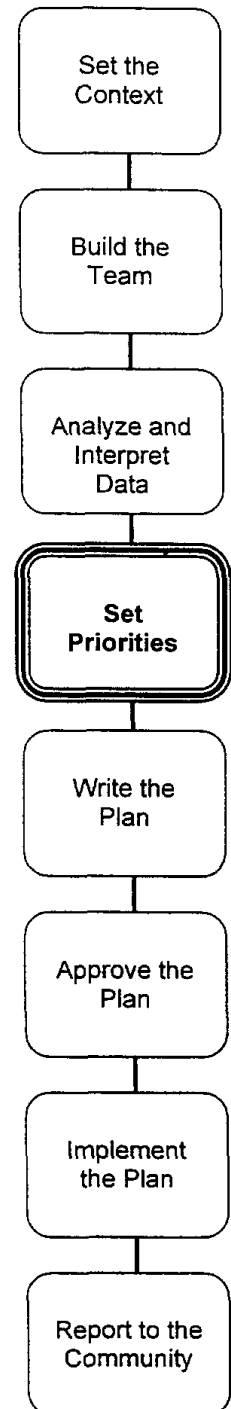# EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

Set Priorities for the Action Plan

Now that you have analyzed the data and identified some areas of need, you must be realistic about your ability and capacity to be effective. If action planning is going to work, you must plan for success. If you are too ambitious, you could set yourself up to fail from the sheer weight of the task. Best practice would tell us not to do this to students, so why do it to yourself?

You need to establish a school culture that supports a commitment to continuous improvement. The best way to do this is to develop action plans that focus efforts and resources on a realistic set of activities that will lead to success for students.

Set the
Context

Build the
Team

Analyze and
Interpret
Data

**Set
Priorities**

Write the
Plan

Approve the
Plan

Implement
the Plan

Report to the
Community

| Setting Priorities | Key ideas |

## Why prioritize the results of your analysis?

The best action plans are those that accurately reflect the ability and capacity of schools to implement them. Plans that are too ambitious are likely to fail, therefore it is important to develop plans that are "do-able" and are likely to succeed. Small successes create a school culture that is committed to continuous improvement. Rather than avoid doing what is difficult, divide difficult goals into manageable parts and achievable actions.

How do you choose among a number of important or competing needs?

Remember, you do not have to do it all in the first year! Your team, which is composed of people with a range of skills and perspectives, can begin to form a consensus on the relative priority of your identified needs. To begin this process, you might ask the following questions:

❑ Are there significant underserved populations? Weak curricular areas?
❑ What is the most important area or group on which to concentrate?
❑ Will focusing on this area/group have a broad impact on student performance?
❑ Will focusing on this area/group have support from staff, parents, and the board?

Key ideas
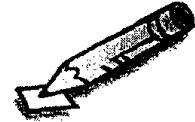
Plan to Succeed

▶ Establish a culture for continuous improvement

▶ Be realistic

▶ Make it doable

_____

Prioritize findings

_____

Focus on the key finding or area of need

_____

Prioritize recommendations using this three- level model:

1. Solution or action obvious

2. Requires further investigation and discussion

3. Beyond the scope or range of the school to accomplish alone

Recommendation, Action Planning and Improvement Definition (R.A.P.I.D.) Process Guide (Allied Signal Aerospace, 1998, on-line at http://www.ati.stevens-tech.edu/pal/recommen.htm)

Maximize local funds and human resources

▶ Reallocate existing resources

▶ Reassign current staff

▶ Rethink current practice

How do you choose among the many recommendations or strategies that are proposed to address key findings or the areas of need?

Your team will need to work on building a consensus based on the identified need(s) and the data used in that decision. A simple three-level model can help to prioritize your recommendations:

Level	Action
1. *The solution or action is obvious.* ▪▪▶	**1.** Assign the recommendation to a responsible individual to handle.
2. *The recommendation needs further investigation or clarification.* ▪▪▶	**2.** The team needs to work to review and refine possible actions before making a recommendation for the action plan.
3. *The recommendation is beyond the scope or range of the school.* ▪▪▶	**3.** Delegate upward or outward to an appropriate person or group, perhaps at the supervisory union level.

How do you ensure the recommendations can be addressed with limited resources? Which get funded? Which get supported?

There is probably only so much money in your current budget for things such as materials, professional development, etc. Staff already have assignments and roles -- who will do the new tasks? Identifying and utilizing other sources of funding is critical. Remember, the local budget is not the only source for funds or assistance.

You can earmark monies from a variety of sources to fund portions of your action plan.

Federal Formula Grants
- Consolidated Federal Programs (Titles I, II, IV, VI)
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) grants
- Early Essential Education (EEE) grants
- Carl Perkins grants

Competitive Federal Grants
- Goals 2000
- Technology Learning Challenge grants
- Comprehensive School Reform (Obey-Porter)
- Eisenhower Higher Education grants
- Service Learning grants
- School-To-Work grants

State Grants
- Act 230 - Educational Support Systems (ESS) (now called Act 157)
- Building Effective Supports for Teaching (BEST) grants
- Medicaid
- Early Reading grants
- Vermont Rural Partnership grants

(**Note**: Be aware of potential supplanting issues when planning grant budgets.)

Remember too, all of the activities and work associated with the action plan are not necessarily dependent on financial support. Some actions, perhaps even the most critical ones, are dependent on commitment, shared vision and goals, and time. When building your plan, look at the total pool of resources available for your use. Maximize the resources you can bring to bear to achieve the goals of your action plan.

Develop networks among your colleagues, with other schools, and with professional organizations. There could be a variety of partnerships with businesses, institutions of higher learning, and organizations like VISMT that could help you carry out your action plan. The Department of Education can also provide many levels of technical assistance through program specialists, Title I Program Improvement and School Improvement personnel, and the Management Information System (MIS). The Department is developing an electronic information resource called *The Clearinghouse for Improving Student Performance*, which will expand the efforts of the Vermont Alliance for School Improvement.

The consensus that you have established among your staff and planning team will support you. The fact that you have agreement about the importance of the recommendations and findings can be a lever to reassign current financial and human resources. If, for example, you have focused on mathematics problem solving, you might defer the

Key Ideas
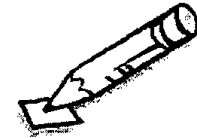
Seek outside resources and assistance to supplement local resources
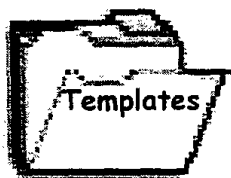
▶ Grants
▶ Partnerships
▶ Networks

_____

Be willing to let go

_____

Be flexible

_____

Be creative

_____

Stay focused

_____

Work smarter, not harder

_____

Time management template
See Appendix D.2

Resources

Finding Time and Using It Effectively (Annenburg Institute for School Reform, 1998, on-line at http://www.aisr.brown.edu/tools/toolist.html). *See Appendix D.1*

Consider meeting more frequently for shorter intervals while using the "Four D's"
~ drop it
~ delay it
~ delegate it
~ do it

From: Kentucky Education Association & Appalachia Educational Laboratory, (1993). *Finding Time for School Reform: Obstacles and Answers,* Office of Educational Research and Improvement, USDOE

purchase of textbooks in social studies in favor of purchasing mathematics materials for the current year. You might agree to limit the use of professional development money only to training in this area. You might also consider reassigning or restructuring the work that individuals do in the school to support the effort.

Keep in mind that while action planning is a yearly activity, your plan will most likely be a multi-year effort. Work with the school board to build a budget that supports the needs of the action plan. Establish an expectation that your action plan and your student assessment data are integral to the board's ongoing budget development process.

What about time?
How do you get more of that?

Unfortunately, time is a finite commodity and already in short supply. The best you can do is to use it better and more efficiently:

▶ Focus your work and meetings on the priorities that you have set.
▶ Work to make meetings more productive by being agenda and results driven.
▶ Identify and establish better personal work habits.
▶ Use "personal work plans" for your own work.
▶ Explore ways to "make" time for professional development and collaboration, such as creative scheduling, different use of inservice time, redefinition of the school day or school year.